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NAPLES FOR ADMIRAL ULRICH AND AMBASSADOR CURRAN, SECDEF FOR
FATA AND BEIN, USNIC FOR WIGHTMAN AND MCLANE, USNATO FOR
REID, UNDERWOOD, SHAFFER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA: SCENESETTER FOR THE JULY 19-20 VISIT OF
ADMIRAL ULRICH

REF: A. SARAJEVO 1209

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 832

[1](#)C. SARAJEVO 467

[1](#)D. SARAJEVO 728

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas McElhaney. Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Your visit comes at a time of high political polarization in Bosnia. Increased tensions have resulted in the near total paralysis of government and the reform process. Nationalism has even begun to impact the defense reform agenda, where we have seen some recent slippage in the so far successful efforts to stand-up a single armed forces and national-level ministry of defense. Despite this, defense reform remains a success story for Bosnia, and Bosnia's inclusion into the Partnership for Peace has provided the country its first formal link to Euro-Atlantic institutions. We have continued to develop a robust bilateral security relationship with Bosnia, and have been successful in securing continued support for coalition operations. During your visit, you will want to engage with senior Bosnian leaders on these important issues, and encourage their sustained strong commitment to move forward down the Euro-Atlantic path. End summary.

Objectives

[1](#)2. (C) From the Embassy perspective, both the public aspects of your visit as well as your meetings with Bosnian officials will serve to:

-- Urge political leaders to look toward the future rather than focusing on past wrongs.

-- Underline the importance the U.S. places on Bosnia and continuing reform; including in the defense sector.

-- Warn those who challenge Bosnia's system, or stability, that the West Balkans are crucial to NATO/U.S. security.

-- Compliment Bosnia on its deployment to Iraq as well as its participation in UN peacekeeping operations in Ethiopia and

Eritrea and Congo.

Deteriorating Political Climate

13. (C) Your visit comes against the backdrop of a political climate that has not been as difficult in many years. Kosovo looms for the Serbs here as a pretext for unilateral moves to distance the Republika Srpska from the Bosnian state. The February 26 verdict of the International Court of Justice, ruling that genocide occurred in Bosnia during the war, has refocused Bosniak (Muslim) grievances and has caused Serb politicians to retrench in defensive positions. This hostile environment has precluded any meaningful work on the reform agenda, with politicians seemingly incapable of abandoning ethnic platforms. For the past sixteen months the Office of the High Representative was ineffective and failed completely to advance meaningful reform or improve the functioning of the deadlocked government. We are hopeful that Miroslav Lajcak, the new High Representative who took office on July 1, will be more effective in exerting control over disruptive political leaders. Despite these growing concerns, European Union member states continue to promote a Bosnia policy that is process-oriented rather than substantive. Despite Washington's efforts to get Bosnians back to the reform process, including a June meeting of RS Prime Minister Dodik and Bosniak Presidency member Silajdzic in Washington, these factors have complicated our ability to push Bosnia forward, and its prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration appear to be receding further into the future.

Defense Reform: Work Still to be Done

14. (C) Defense reform is one of the biggest success stories in Bosnia since Dayton. In a two year period, Bosnia adopted a Law on Defense, abolished the two entity-level Ministries of Defense and created a single state institution in their place. Consulting with NATO HQ, the Ministry of Defense decided on a force structure for the new, joint Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the Presidency approved in July 2006. The new units created under the decision have been established, and should be fully-staffed by mid-summer. A clear and direct command and control structure has been developed and adopted. The new Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces have worked well together, and undertaken successful joint planning activities such as the deployment of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit to Iraq. The new state-level institutions met the conditions for PfP membership, and the decision to invite Bosnia into the organization was partially seen as validation of the progress to date. On July 12 Prime Minister Spiric led the entities to agreement on the long outstanding issue of transfers of defense property to the state. Although the agreement grants the Ministry of Defense ownership of military equipment and use of military facilities, it remains to be seen if the arrangement meets NATO legal standards.

15. (C) Personnel issues also loom large, and the civilian side of the Ministry of Defense remains severely under-staffed. The military is in the process of filling out its force structure, and hopes to have new units in their new locations by the close of the year. Another cause for concern is the recently proposed defense budget cuts at this crucial juncture in the reform process, just as Bosnia is joining PfP. During your meetings with the senior Bosnian leaders, you will want to push them to see defense reforms through to their conclusion, and adequately fund the Armed Forces to a level to allow them to be active PfP participants.

16. (C) On a positive note, the Ministry of Defense leadership has finally stabilized. Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic assumed office at the end of April, filling a vacuum that had existed since the October election. Our dealings with Cikotic have left us impressed with his straightforward commitment to seeing the defense reform agenda through to completion. Cikotic is, by his own admission, decidedly

pro-American and has been a strong ally in pursuing items on our bilateral agenda. We remain concerned, however, that long-standing allegations of war crimes against Cikotic may eventually cause him political problems. However, we believe that the charges against him are without merit and any legal action against him would have political motivation (reftel B).

Bilateral Security Agenda and Domestic Politics

¶17. (C) Our bilateral security relationship with Bosnia is strong and strengthening. Without U.S. material and technical assistance provided to the government, defense reform would not have been possible. We have targeted our security assistance to supporting the Bosnian Armed Forces' efforts to create a NATO-compatible force capable of deploying on overseas missions. To that end, we have supported the creation and training of the EOD unit, which has deployed five platoon rotations to Iraq since 2005. The presidency and parliament extended the mission's mandate until the end of 2007. Looking ahead, we are targeting our security assistance towards the establishment of other niche-capable and deployable units, including a Military Police unit.

¶18. (S) Gaining approval of the continued deployment of the EOD unit was not easy. The general rightward drift of Bosniak politics here, as led by President Haris Silajdzic, has proved to be a substantial impediment to realizing enhanced or augmented coalition deployments. Silajdzic has stated, both privately and publicly, that the Bosnian public is not prepared to take on additional international burdens, and indicated that he will wield his substantial political clout to block further missions. There has been some discussion of the Bosnian EOD unit assuming counter-Improvised Explosive Device (c-IED) capacity, though no formal request has been made. Minister Cikotic recently informed the Ambassador that he hopes to have several

deployable units established within the next year, but noted that the approval of deployments would be a political rather than logistical matter.

U.S. Drawdown, Eagle Base Closure

¶19. (C) The decision to remove the last U.S. troops from Bosnia was not popular here, especially among Bosniaks. For many, the U.S. presence here is viewed as the glue that holds the country together. A majority of Bosnians believe the U.S. military drawdown will have an adverse effect on the domestic security situation. Though the PfP invitation has gone some way to fill the perceived security void, substantial anxiety remains following the drawdown.

NATO Aspirations

¶10. (C) Full NATO membership enjoys strong public and political support across ethnic lines. While European Union accession is many years away, Bosnians view membership in the premier collective security organization to be within reach and absolutely necessary for their country's long-term peace and prosperity. The PfP invitation was widely hailed here as the first tangible proof that Bosnia's future lies in Euro-Atlantic institutions, and a signal that real progress has been realized in the past decade. The Bosnian political and military leadership have announced their intentions to put Bosnia on the fast-track for full membership, with some officials publicly asserting that membership is a possibility by 2009.

¶11. (C) This overly optimistic prognosis is indicative of a broad lack of understanding of the implications and requirements of NATO membership. As a result, we are confronted with the delicate task of keeping the Bosnians motivated, while simultaneously injecting a dose of realism into the discussions. In the two months since Bosnia acceded

to PfP, there has been little political and public discussion about what the path forward entails, particularly the necessity of reform across the board, including in civilian institutions. Bosnia is inarguably in a better position than some other PfP invitees in that the NATO-directed defense reform process established a military and defense ministry that should eventually be capable of NATO membership. Bosnia remains far ahead of the curve, having finished their Framework Document, IPP, PARP surveys, and is on the verge of signing the PfP SOFA. But most Bosnian leaders still do not seem to understand that NATO requires a host of commitments (and basic reforms) from the entire state, not just the Ministry of Defense.

War Criminals: Good and Bad News

¶12. (C) The arrest and transfer to The Hague of Ratko Mladic, Radovan Karadzic and Stojan Zupljanin remains one of our priority mission goals and an imperative that we raise at every opportunity with Bosnian leaders. It is likely that all three ICTY indictees are outside of Bosnian territory. On May 25, convicted war criminal Radovan Stankovic escaped from custody in Foca Prison and is still at large. Stankovic's escape, which was clearly effected with the complicity and assistance of Foca prison officials, calls into question Bosnia's ability to manage additional ICTY transfers. The RS government is aware of the potential repercussions of this incident and many observers view the sudden arrest and transfer to The Hague of Zdravko Tolimir on May 31 as an attempt by Milorad Dodik and others to ameliorate the damage of the Stankovic escape.

MCELHANEY